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ABSTRACT

A profile is presented in this report of Project HELP (Higher Education Learning Package), a liberal arts instructional program alternative developed to assist high-risk, first-time community college students, with multiple deficiencies in reading, writing, and computational skills, to succeed and continue in college. Introductory material provides information on the two semester general education program consisting of two packages or options (totalling twenty-four units); describes the course content of the HELP program; highlights the program's objectives; and provides a history of the program between 1977 and 1978. Next, the evaluation report for 1981, the fourth year of implementation of the HELP project, is presented. This report describes the students involved in the HELP program, using profiles and case studies; discusses the implications of the HELP student profile for learning and teaching; describes how HELP students are taught; provides information on the kind of learning that takes place; examines the relationship of student achievement to the HELP program goals; and outlines plans for the future. Finally, the report discusses the transportability of the program. Student evaluation data and enrollment statistics are appended. (HB)

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SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

PROJECT HELP: INSTRUCTION FOR HIGH-RISK, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

JC 850 305

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ABSTRACT

Project HELP (Higher Education Learning Package) is a pre-planned two semester liberal arts program, consisting of two packages of courses which can be applied toward the Associate In Arts degree at Sacramento City College. Project HELP began at Sacramento City College in the Fall, 1978 semester to meet the needs of many new students who have multiple deficiencies in reading, writing, and computational skills and who often lack the necessary self-confidence and motivation needed to succeed in college. The Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK) is used to identify students eligible for admission. Students who score between the sixth- and ninth- grade reading levels can qualify for project HELP.

The goals of Project HELP are increased student retention, higher success rate (GPA of C or better) and motivation of students to continue in college. The objectives of the program are as follows: (1) to help students develop the reading, writing, math, and study skills needed to achieve educational and career goals; (2) to utilize a team approach to instruction (integrating roles of teacher, counselor, and tutor); (3) to supplement classroom instruction by extensive tutoring; (4) to motivate student learning by integrating content with skill training; (5) to help students become more successful learners; (6) to help students develop a more positive self-esteem.

Project HELP attempts to accomplish its objectives through a competency-based instructional program with an integrated curriculum. Instructors have the flexibility of using a three hour block of time to provide various learning experiences such as presentation of material, small group interaction, tutoring, and field experiences. An important component of Project HELP is an extensive staff development program to provide instructors with skills to deal more effectively with the non-traditional student.

Evaluation has been an on-going process and the results indicate that Project HELP has been successfully achieving its stated goals.

SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

PROJECT HELP: INSTRUCTION FOR HIGH-RISK, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

What is Project HELP?

Project HELP (Higher Education Learning Package) was implemented in Fall 1978 as an instructional program alternative to assist high risk, first-time community college students to succeed and to continue in college. The Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK) is used to identify students eligible for admission. Students who score between sixth and ninth grade reading levels can qualify for Project HELP.

HELP is a pre-planned two semester general education program, consisting of two packages or options. Each option contains one content course and two support courses, one in reading and the other one in communication. The total program includes two content courses, one course in career exploration, one course in coping in college, and basic skills courses in reading, writing, speaking and computation. Instructors work as a team to integrate basic skills into content instruction.

All courses (24 units total) may be applied toward the Associate in Arts degree. To begin, students may elect either Option 1 or 2, described as follows:

Option 1	Psychology 50 (Psychology of Personal Development) Speech 50 (Practical Speech Training) English 71 (Developmental Reading) Math W (Arithmetic) Technology 38 (Technical Work in Today's Society)
Option 2	Sociology 3 (Marriage and The Family) English 60 (Practical Communication) English 71 (Developmental Reading) Human Development 1 (College Success)

The objectives of Project HELP are as follows: (1) to help students develop the reading, writing, math and study skills needed to achieve educational and career goals; (2) to utilize a team approach to instruction (integrating roles of teacher, counselor, tutor); (3) to supplement classroom instruction by extensive tutoring; (4) to motivate student learning by integrating content with skill training; (5) to help stu-

dents develop a more positive self esteem; (6) to help students become more successful learners.

The program is therefore personal in its approach and delivery. As far as possible, barriers to learning are eliminated. For example, classes meet in a 3 hour time block on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (9 a.m. to 12 noon); reading and writing instruction is provided from the texts required in the content courses; group processes are used rather then lecture; student success is measured in terms of defined course competencies; and all instructors conduct extensive personal counseling because the student needs are so dependent on solving personal problems first.

Project HELP: Program History And Organization

Spring 1977 - A Sacramento City College questionnaire (prepared by Counseling Services) for new students provided data. Students indicated that they had severe reading, writing, and computational skills deficiencies. They also indicated that they generally lacked self-confidence and motivation, and that they were unsure of any educational goals. The questionnaire results provided an estimate that 70% of the new students needed help. The high attrition rate, a general problem of community colleges, was also a major consideration.

Fall 1977 - A college wide Basic Skills Committee was charged by the President of the college to review the basic skills needs at Sacramento City College and to make recommendations for fulfilling these needs. A major outcome of the Committee's work was the development of an alternative general education (liberal arts) program, using an interdisciplinary/integrated team approach. The plan evolved from visits to community colleges, current literature, and committee discussions.

January 1978 - Dean of Student Services, Deans of Instructional Areas, EOPS Coordinator and interested staff met to consider the instructional program in terms of meeting the needs of the EOPS (Educational Opportunities Program and Services) and other high-risk students. Implementation was recommended at this meeting. Dean of Students met with Associate Dean of Instruction as to the possibility of ressigned time for interested instructors.

February 1978 - The Interdisciplinary/Integrated Team Package Design was completed with four components: (1) attention to personal needs of students with a counseling component in the classroom; (2) instructional success strategies based on competency-based instructional strategies; (3) an interdisciplinary team structure; (4) a consideration of providing shortcuts for the adult learner within the course structure; the linking of elements and processes, usually separate in a conventional learning situation; the linking of the separate elements of counseling and teaching to become a single process; the linking of the usually separate elements of basic skills and content courses to become a single process in a team format.

February-June 1978 - Staff training for eight instructors began as follows: (1) A team of consultants developed and provided the in-service training ($1,000 provided from the EOPS budget); (2) The college provided reassigned time for instructors to participate--six formula hours each for six instructors, three formula hours each for two instructors or a total of 2.8 FTE; (3) The logistics of scheduling classes were solved--no new courses; two sections of each course were added to the computer for purposes of instructor load. Course cards were put together to include a package of four courses for each

of the two program options. Enrollment in the HELP program meant enrollment in a package of four courses (12 units). Students could also enroll in additional courses, not included in the HELP program, if they chose to do so.

July 1978 - Implementation of an Assessment Center to provide advisement to students as to basic skills proficiency. TASK (Stanford Test of Academic Skills) instrument was agreed upon.

July-September 1978 - Implementation of 22, nine-hour orientation sessions including assessment, at .5 unit credit under Human Development 1 to identify students for the Project; development of a video tape program to inform students as to what Project HELP could offer them.

September 1978 - Implementation of Project HELP under the management and supervision of the Associate Dean of Instruction, Project Director and the Assistant Dean of Languages/ Literature, Project Curriculum Coordinator. Responsibility for staff development activities were to be shared by these two persons.

Project HELP: 1981 Evaluation Report

The academic year 1981-82 marked the fourth year of the implementation of Project HELP at Sacramento City College, as one component of the College's efforts to help students who are deficient in basic skills to attain educational goals. Evaluation has been an on-going process both internally by the project managers and the participating faculty, as well as by an outside consultant (1979-money provided from a $10,000 grant from the Community College Chancellor's Fund for Improvement of Instruction). Various kinds of data have been collected, documented and reviewed. These data have been helpful in providing direction for needed program changes. In addition, they provide a basis for making some definitive statements about the overall impact of the HELP program.

This evaluation report is organized to respond to the following questions: (1) Who are the students in the HELP program? (2) What are the implications of the HELP student profile for learning and teaching? (3) How are HELP students taught? (4) What kinds of learning takes place? (5) What is the relationship of student retention and achievement to the HELP program's goals? (6) What are the plans for the future?

I. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS IN THE HELP PROGRAM?

Student Profile - The HELP students, mainly first-time college students at reading levels ranging from sixth to ninth grades (based of the Stanford Test of Academic Skills), have continued to display certain characteristics. These are a lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem, lack of motivation, insecurity in the college environment, deficiency in the basic skills needed for academic success, and inability to set priorities. In addition, the students have many and varied personal problems. The following case studies illustrate specifically the nature of the HELP students.

Case Study I - Gilbert came into the HELP program (Option 1, Fall 1981) as a disinterested and alienated minority student. His previous success in school had been negligible. During the first part of the semester, Gilbert was detached, lethargic and skeptical about his college experience. In fact, he was considering returning to auto body repair work, but the employment opportunities were discouraging.

During the first examination in psychology, the instructor discovered that Gilbert had "borrowed" answers from another student; consequently, the first of several one-to-one contacts were arranged by the instructor. After a period of close monitoring and directive counseling, Gilbert's attitude began to change. He showed enthusiasm and interest in the subject and soon developed a new identity, that of a "good" student. At the end of the semester, he was looking forward to enrolling in Option 2 and to completing one year of college work.

Case Study II - Carmen was representative of several older, re-entry women who first enrolled in the HELP program in Fall 1981. She was a middle-aged, single parent with low self esteem, feeling little control over her

own life. However, she had ability and was motivated, interested and committed. Due to the encouragement of the instructors and the supportive environment of the program, Carmen's self concept began to improve. She completed both options of the HELP program, exhibiting growth in reading, writing and organizational skills, as well as in self-concept. Her performance seemed to indicate that she would succeed in college.

Case Study III - Jean's reading scores upon entry into the HELP program (Option 2, Fall 1981) were at approximately the mid-seventh grade level as measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. She had the ability to gain much from the program. Due to her personal problems, however, Jean's attendance was erratic and her assignments, when completed, were more of a chore than a learning experience. She barely earned a "C" grade. Jean's personal problems throughout the semester were too overwhelming to permit her to develop her skills and to improve her learning self-image.

Case Study IV - John was accepted into the HELP program after lengthy deliberation by the instructors. He was told that his skill level was not high enough (approximately fourth grade reading level as measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test) to succeed in the HELP program; and that the work would be difficult and would require extra effort on his part. However, his enthusiasm and motivation convinced the instructors that he would be able to cope.

John maintained a positive attitude throughout the semester and never missed a class session. He completed more than the required number of laboratory hours required in the reading course. Still, John's work in all three of the subject areas remained beyond his grasp. When submitted, his assignments had either been done by someone else or they demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the concepts involved. Perhaps, John could have profited more if he had enrolled in one or two reading and writing courses rather than the HELP program.

II. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE HELP STUDENT PROFILE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING?

Successes - Instructors in both options have indicated that the academic progress of the students is generally related to a change of attitude,

improved self-image and the development of self-confidence, brought about by the supportive environment of the program -- caring attitude on the part of instructors for the students and of the students for each other. However, the instructors also agree that a sixth grade reading level is the minimum functional level for students to succeed in college, even with extensive intervention.

Problems - The major obstacles to student progress appear to be the level of basic skills deficiency (below sixth grade reading level) as in the case of John (Case Study III), and the numerous personal problems which cause frequent absence or "drop-out" and prevent personal and academic growth, as in the case of Jean (Case Study IV).

III. HOW ARE HELP STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Unique to the HELP program is a threefold emphasis in teaching: (1) team teaching across disciplines; (2) competency based instruction using concrete, explicit discriptions of learning tasks (Each instructor teaches two course objectives developed cooperatively with team members. Students sometimes do not recognize, for example, which is the Speech or Psychology or Reading instructor since instructor roles are merged); and (3) extensive counseling and support services.

The instructors in Option 1 -- psychology, speech and reading -- have taught together for three years. The techniques they use to integrate the instruction of the three courses include group discussion, basic encounter group techniques, films, role playing, individual speeches, individualized instruction, lecture, field work, and laboratory experience in the reading laboratory. The instructors believe that a broad instructional base maintains high interest and is motivational. Therefore, the course content focuses on high motivation topics, related as much as possible to the interests of the students.

On the other hand, the instructors in Option 2 are a relatively new team. Both the content and reading course instructors changed during the 1981-82 academic year. While they need time to develop a more thorough approach to integrate the instruction of the three courses -- sociology, reading and writing -- they have developed some successful techniques.

For example, the instructors used group encounter sessions to resolve negative student behaviors and the problems relating to the program. These sessions resulted in some positive changes. The students became aquainted with each other and consequently more respectful of each other's needs. They also developed an acceptance of a new content course and a new instructor.

A basic premise of the HELP program is that the development of a positive self image and positive attitudes about college precedes most cognitive development. This premise is, therefore, a major consideration in working with high risk students. In Option 1, for example, the instructors have been presenting goals, activities, and evaluation in four units. The students work initially in the effective domain (units one and two) in order to establish cohesiveness, trust and supportive environment. Units three and four focus more heavily on the cognitive domain, and mastery of information related to personal adjustment becomes the major objective. Specific examples of student gains include the following: (1) Students have acquired an acceptance of self and a feeling of personal confidence ("I can succeed."); (2) Disorganized and unsuccessful students have learned how to take notes, read for key concepts, use the library, and succeed on exams; (3) Students have become excited about learning and eager to attain newly-found academic career goals ("I'm going to be a Dental Hygienist.")

IV. WHAT KIND OF LEARNING TAKES PLACE?

Instructor evaluation of the learning of the HELP students in the academic year 1981-82 included many kinds of measures giving both quantitative and descriptive information.

In Option 1, the speech instructor measured student progress by tape-recordings with pre and post test results for each student. A Likert scale was used to measure five characteristics of good speaking: fluency, poise, expression, clarity, and eye contact. Scores indicated gains for most students. (Table I) The content instructor (psychology) measured progress in personal development skills in the areas of locus of control and self-concept, using the Norwicki Strickland Scale and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. Gains were reported in both areas --

an average gain of 2.4 between the pre and post measure on the Norwicki Strickland Scale and an average gain of 6.9 between and pre and post measure on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. Overall student progress was evaluated by the instructors in terms of completed assignments, periodic examinations (essay and multiple-choice), involvement in course activities, and attainment of established course competencies. Each instructor noted grades on an individual basis for each student (A, B, C, D or F) after consultation with team colleagues.

In Option 2, the content instructor evaluated student progress primarily by unit tests. The composition instructor evaluated student progress as an increase in the length of paragraphs written and an increase in the abilities to draft and rewrite, to incorporate lecture content into writing, to take tests, to identify the number and use of grammatical terms in a composition, and to use the library.

In both Option 1 and 2, the reading instructors tabulated and monitored reading skills development with a standardized test. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test was used to measure pre and post results and gains. For the first time since the implementation of Project HELP, every student in Option 1 increased his/her reading level by the end of the semester. This increase represented an overall 2.03 grade level advance in reading comprehension.

V. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT TO THE HELP PROGRAM'S GOALS?

The HELP program, since it serves the high risk and generally the educationally disadvantaged student, is flexible and people centered. It provides extensive student-to-student support as well as teacher-to-teacher support. It relies on a committed staff who can link content instruction with basic skills instruction and who can motivate and teach a segment of students who otherwise might not be able to achieve a higher education.

Research provides support in considering the efficacy of the premises of the HELP program. In their recent book, The American Community

College (1982), Cohen and Brawer state: "when special treatment is applied, when students are given supplemental counseling, tutoring and learning aids, when they are singled out for additional work, they tend to remain in school." (P.234)

K. Patricia Cross points out in Adult Learning (1981) that " . . . non-traditional study is more an attitude than a system. . . . This attitude puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's need than the latter's convenience . . ." (P.10). She asserts that "it is just as important to know why adults do not participate in learning as why they do." (P.97) And, she clarifies the importance of programs based on learner standards. (P.34)

Furthermore, studies of successful developmental programs show that these are based on the assumption that "more than grammar and punctuation have to be dealt with -- students prior education and their negative self-images also have to be considered." (Zwerling, The Crises of The Community College, 1976)

The overall goals of the HELP program have been consistently the following: 1) to reduce the high failure and attrition rate of non-traditional, high risk, first time college students; and 2) to aid these students in completing one year of college.

Some of Project HELP's significant gains are reported in yearly evaluations. In 1979, a comparative analysis using experimental and control groups (Assessment Center Research Staff) revealed that HELP students attempted more units, completed more units, earned higher grades and a higher overall grade point average than their peers (based on TASK reading scores) who choose not to enroll in the program.

The 1980 evaluation model to improve the program implementation showed that the HELP program improved basic and study skills. A 22% gain in the improvement of study skills was perceived by students in a self-study.

A follow-up study of HELP students (Spring 1981) revealed that of the 44 program completers (both options), 30 had enrolled in "regular"

college classes; 21 were still enrolled at Sacramento City College, maintaining a grade point average ranging from 2.0 (C) to 3.1 (B).

Student evaluations and/or interviews conducted each semester have been very positive. For example, interviews with students at the end of the Spring 1982 semester indicated progress in study skills, reading and writing ability and personal success skills. Students also stated that their experiences in the HELP program had given them more confidence to enter the general curriculum.

During each of the four years that the HELP program has been in existence, data have been kept by the Project Director on enrollments and retention. In both options, there has been a noticeable improvement in retention. In Option 1, the percentage of retention rose from 60% in 1978-79 to 92% in 1981-82; in Option 2, from 54% in 1978-79 to 85% in 1981-82. (Table 2)

These date support the basic premise of the HELP Project managers; that is, a caring attitude and a supportive environment yields positive results.

VI. WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

The HELP instructors are fully aware that student absenteeism is a major factor in student attrition. Combating the absence problems will continue to be one of the major goals for the instructors in both options. Proposed approaches will include the daily monitoring of attendance, peer involvement in monitoring regular attendance (students telephone each other) and the development of group cohesiveness and support early in the semester.

While integrated and interdisciplinary instruction is difficult, it can become easier through continuous staff development activity and close communication among all of the team instructors. The successfully established pattern of bi-monthly meetings will continue.

Since two of the instructors in Option 2 joined the HELP program team very recently (1981-82), competency based instruction will be a

priority in 1982-83. The team will continue to develop a list of competencies to be attained, appropriate instructional activities and an evaluation component for each defined unit of instruction. Option 1 instructors will continue to evaluate and update existing practices.

Finally, while students have been consistently offered a choice of entry into either Option 1 or 2 of the HELP program each semester, only one option will be offered in Fall 1982, on an experimental basis, for the following reasons: (1) An examination of the enrollment and rentention rates for both options suggsts that students need and prefer to concentrate on personal development (psychology course, Option 1) and reading, writing and math skills building before they can attempt a content course in preparation for mainstreaming into a program major; (2) The offering of only one option each semester will provide a pattern of continuity for students as well as facilitate the process of student "follow-up"(only one group of students); and (3) Budget constraints suggest an evaluation of the FTE expended for Project HELP in relation to the FTE expended for the total basic skills effort of the college.

Project HELP: Transportability - Project HELP is a viable program that meets specific student needs and produces positive results as shown in the evaluations. The Project can be replicated at any community college (a video tape describing the HELP program to students is available on loan from Sacramento City College on request.) Initial and on-going implementation requires not only faculty interest and involvement but a total institutional commitment to provide funds (internal and/or outside grants) to permit the extensive staff development needed, to absorb staff reassignment, and to provide the required teaching space.

TABLES

TABLE I

SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

HELP - OPTION I
Speech 50 - Progress Evaluation By Numbers of Students

N = 13

	Pre Test			Post Test			Gains	
Vocal Characteristics	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Point Increase	Level Increase
Clarity	-	12	1	-	11	2	4	1
Phrasing	1	12	-	-	7	6	12	7
Stress	2	10	1	-	6	7	13	9
Confidence	2	11	-	-	7	6	13	8

Voices were taped and evaluation was measured using the Likert Scale. Range used: 1-3 below average; 4-6 average; 7-10 above average.

SUMMARY

1. Post test shows all students at average or above level in the four characteristics measured.
2. Post test shows all students with point gains in stress and confidence.
3. Post test shows all but one student with point gain in phrasing. (Student with no gain was at average level.)
4. Post test shows that 54% of population advanced in level of phrasing, 69% in level of stress, and 62% in level of confidence.
5. Post test shows that 31% of population gained points in clarity and 8% advanced in level of clarity. Gains in this area are the lowest. However, improvement in clarity takes more work than improvement in phrasing, stress and confidence.

TABLE 2

SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

HELP PROGRAM

ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION PATTERNS

	Option I	Option II
1978-79		
Enrollments 4th week	87	72
Enrollments End of Semester	52	39
Percentage of Retention	60%	54%
1979-80		
Enrollments 4th week	80	68
Enrollments End of Semester	52	41
Percentage of Retention	65%	60%
1980-81		
Enrollments 4th week	67	51
Enrollments End of Semester	48	30
Percentage of Retention	72%	59%
1981-82		
Enrollments 4th week	50	46
Enrollments End of Semester	46	39
Percentage of Retention	92%	85%

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